Another cave that once housed Dead Sea Scrolls discovered

by [Charlie Wood](#) in the [March 15, 2017](#) issue

([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) This time it was a team of archaeologists, rather than a Bedouin goat herder, who made a potentially history-shaping discovery.

The team found a 12th cave that they say was once home to ancient documents known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, the first such find in 60 years. While no new texts were recovered, the discovery suggests that the hills of Qumran in the Judean Desert may hold more secrets.

"Until now, it was accepted that Dead Sea Scrolls were found only in 11 caves at Qumran, but now there is no doubt that this is the 12th cave," said Oren Gutfeld of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, team coleader, in a statement.

Niches along the cave's walls concealed a number of artifacts, including jars and cloth coverings for scrolls, leather straps, string, and a blank scroll. The remains are tantalizing, and Gutfeld is confident that the cave once contained the real deal.

"Although at the end of the day no scroll was found, and instead we 'only' found a piece of parchment rolled up in a jug that was being processed for writing, the findings indicate beyond any doubt that the cave contained scrolls that were stolen," he wrote.

Archaeologists are working on the assumption that Bedouins looted the cave in the mid-20th century, based on two iron pickaxes found inside the cave tunnel.

The find reopens a chapter of archaeological history many had thought closed. The Dead Sea Scrolls are ancient texts that were hidden on the shores of the Dead Sea in 68 BC to protect them from the advancing Roman army. The hiders did their job so well that the documents were lost for more than 2,000 years, to be found only when a Bedouin herder stumbled upon them in 1947.

Written on parchment and animal skin in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek, the documents give insight into life and religion during antiquity as well as at the birth of Christianity. In addition to calendars and descriptions of community rules, they

contain early drafts of books of the Hebrew Bible. These scrolls have been thoroughly analyzed. This discovery raises the possibility that more scrolls could be out there, in the hundreds of caves left to be explored.

"The important discovery of another scroll cave attests to the fact that a lot of work remains to be done in the Judean Desert and finds of huge importance are still waiting to be discovered," Yisrael Hasson, director-general of the Israel Antiquities Authority, said in a statement. "We are in a race against time as antiquities thieves steal heritage assets worldwide for financial gain. The state of Israel needs to mobilize and allocate the necessary resources in order to launch a historic operation, together with the public, to carry out a systematic excavation of all the caves of the Judean Desert."

The discovery also casts doubt on some of the conclusions regarding the original scrolls.

"Finding this additional scroll cave means we can no longer be certain that the original locations (caves one through 11) attributed to the Dead Sea Scrolls that reached the market via the Bedouins are accurate," Gutfeld said.

Qumran, where the scrolls were found, is part of the West Bank, an area occupied by Israel, where not even archaeology can remain apolitical. Jewish and Palestinian leaders often clash over construction and excavation in Jerusalem, where each side seeks historical evidence to support its claims to the land and undermine those of the other side.

Eric Meyers, a religion professor at Duke University, commented on a clash over Palestinian removal of material from the Temple Mount, which is sacred to both Jews and Muslims, in 2013: "The stakes, in political terms, are very high. You have a huge misuse of archaeology by both sides to prove their narrative is more true than others and to justify facts on the ground."

A version of this article, which was edited on February 24, appears in the March 15 print edition under the title "Cave that housed Dead Sea Scrolls found."